

## Pecos Road: Village planners mull over parkway instead of freeway

[By Doug Murphy](#)

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Opponents and proponents of the South Mountain Loop 202 Freeway have drawn lines in the sand and appear to be firm in their beliefs.

Supporters say that the freeway along Pecos Road, from Interstate 10 in Ahwatukee Foothills to Interstate 109 near 51st Avenue, is critical to the future transportation needs of the Valley. Opponents call it a \$1.3 billion boondoggle that won't relieve future congestion and will harm communities and health.

Laurel Arndt thinks there may be another way that's a win-win for everyone.

"The reality is we do need to have improvement along Pecos Road. While we don't feel we need to be part of a freeway system, the Estrella community still needs an out," Arndt said last week during a meeting of the Ahwatukee Foothills Village Planning Committee, of which she is a member.

Her proposal is to build a parkway with a tunnel under the edge of South Mountain Park instead of a freeway cutting through several ridges in the park.

"The impact could be considerably less if we went from a 12-lane cut to a parkway that might be seven or eight lanes with a tunnel," Arndt said.

The Arizona Department of Transportation quickly threw cold water on the idea.

"ADOT's position is it (a parkway) would not meet the purpose and need" that has been identified, which includes moving up to 190,000 vehicles a day in 30 years, said Tim Tait, a spokesman for ADOT.

Tait added that the state doesn't build parkways and that the funding from Proposition 400, passed by voters in 2004, includes money specifically earmarked to build the Loop 202 Freeway and not a parkway.

"Who would pay for it?" Tait asked.

Opposition of the freeway has remained steady, with concerns by some over health-related issues associated with a freeway next to a half-dozen schools in Ahwatukee Foothills. Others are concerned that the freeway should be further south and west than the original 1985 design to help relieve expected congestion from rapidly growing areas in Pinal County and in the far West Valley.

There are also cultural concerns that have been expressed by the Gila River Indian Community that holds South Mountain sacred. Construction of the freeway, especially deep cuts through several ridges in South Mountain Park, could impact or destroy some of the important sites they hold sacred.

"I think they're realizing they can't shove this one through - there's going to be a lawsuit," said Arndt, who is also a member of the Citizens Advisory Team that ADOT formed to look at the freeway's design and route.

Village planning chairman Doug Cole said he would have to see details of a plan before he would commit on the idea of a parkway along Pecos, but said the idea was worth exploring. One advantage of a parkway over a freeway is the lower speed limit.

“That really knocks the noise down,” said Rob Robinson, a Phoenix police lieutenant and member of the Village Planning Committee.

The Village Planning Committee has been on the record for years opposing a freeway along Pecos Road that would result in the elimination of 255 homes.

In 1999, the city of Phoenix pitched building a parkway to ADOT after the 1985 plan was put on hold because of a lack of funding. At the time, the city was willing to pay for the construction with ADOT paying the city back in the future when it had the funds.

ADOT later quashed the idea of a parkway and in 2004 voters in Maricopa County extended for 20 years a half-cent sales tax to fund transportation projects, including the South Mountain Loop 202.

A draft environmental impact statement, showing the freeway being constructed along Pecos Road through South Mountain Park and then north to I-10, has been written but not approved by the Federal Highway Administration.

For more information, visit [www.azdot.gov/Highways/Valley\\_Freeways](http://www.azdot.gov/Highways/Valley_Freeways).